

**TO:** Project Right Side  
**FROM:** Alicia Downs & Alex Lundry; TargetPoint Consulting  
**DATE:** November 7, 2012  
**RE:** 10 Key Data Points on Marriage Equality

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Project Right Side has a unique and voluminous dataset on Americans' attitudes towards the freedom to marry. Over the last year, we've surveyed 16,000 voters on the freedom to marry. The key points collected below come from these data, as well as from public polling and the 2012 National Exit Poll.

- 1) **Marriage equality had a very good night on Election Day.** Majorities of voters in Maine (53-47), Maryland (52-48), and Washington (52-48) legalized same-sex marriage on Election Day, while a majority of voters in Minnesota (51-49) defeated an attempt to define "traditional marriage" in the constitution. And even if it wasn't on the ballot, according to exit polling, 49% of American voters this year believe that same sex marriage should be legal in their state, while 46% believe it should not. In Project Right Side battleground polling 52% of voters said yes, marriage between gay and lesbian couples should be recognized by the law as valid with the same rights as traditional marriage.
- 2) **We've come a long way in three short years as attitudes towards gay marriage have shifted dramatically.** According to the Gallup poll, as recently as 2009, a distinct 57% majority of Americans were opposed to gay marriage, while only 40% supported it. But last May, for the first time ever, Gallup found a 53% majority in favor of legal gay marriage, and 45% opposed.
- 3) **Mitt Romney received the lowest share of the gay and lesbian vote since the exit poll first asked sexual orientation in 1996.** 5% of American voters this year identified as gay or lesbian on the exit poll questionnaire; of those, only 22% supported Governor Romney, the lowest Republican share since this data has been collected. The high for Republicans came just four years earlier, in 2008, when 28% of gay and lesbian voters supported Senator McCain.
- 4) **Among those that say it is a top priority, attitudes towards gay marriage are split.** From our election night survey, we found that unsurprisingly, in an election year dominated by jobs and the economy, gay marriage was *not* a top priority among battleground state voters. However, a non-trivial 17% of voters in these states said it was a very high priority. Further, reinforcing an emerging opinion trend, it is no longer only a top priority among only opponents of gay marriage; rather, among those that said it was a very high priority, slightly less than half are same sex marriage supporters: 46% support and 50% oppose.
- 5) **Marriage was a motivating factor in candidate support on Election Day for 7 out of 10 voters in battleground states.** Gay marriage was a positive motivator for nearly 3 out of 4 Obama voters in battleground states, with 73% of the president's supporters saying that his support for marriage equality made them more likely to vote for the President. Indeed, almost half of his voters (45%) said it made them MUCH more likely to support him. Another 18% say it made no difference, while 5% begrudgingly supported the president despite his views, saying it made them less likely to support him. For Governor Romney, half of his voters said that his opposition to gay marriage made them more likely to support him, though a sizable 35% of his supporters said it made no difference. Slightly more than 1 out of 10 Romney voters say his opposition to gay marriage diminished their support for him.

- 6) **Gay marriage netted Obama about 233,000 votes on Election Day in battleground states; he won those states by 504,422 votes.** Let's make some very conservative assumptions in order to have a rough estimate of how many votes Obama may have received because of his support for marriage equality. Let's take non-Democrats that 1) voted for President Obama, 2) said gay marriage was a *very* high priority for them, and 3) said the president's stance made them *much* more likely to support him. This is exactly 0.85% of the electorate in battleground ground states, or about 233,193 actual voters. This would indicate that around 233,000 voters in battleground states voted for Obama specifically because of gay marriage; accounting for about half of his winning margin there. Without those votes Obama's winning margin would have been razor thin.
- 7) **When given an opportunity to take a pro or con stand on various gay rights messages and issues, majorities of voters in battleground states stood on the side of gay rights 15 out of 15 times.** Across a variety of issues on gay rights, spanning all the way from marriage equality to workplace non-discrimination law to hospital visitation rights, more than 50% of voters took the pro-gay rights side of each of our 15 questions.
- 8) **When you look at Republican voters, the data we have collected reveal a Republican electorate at odds with the conventional wisdom of a robustly anti-gay GOP.** Instead, our surveys show that a pronounced majority of Republican voters are more favorable than unfavorable to an expansion of a variety of legal rights to gays and lesbians. For 9 out of 12 questions, a majority of Republicans express a pro-gay rights sentiment; for 12 out of 12, there were more pro-gay rights Republicans than there were those that were anti-gay rights. On a composite measure of these items, 65% of Republicans were more favorable than unfavorable to expansions of gay rights, while only a small minority of 29% were net opponents of gay rights. On marriage, 62% of Republicans believe that gay couples should have at least some legal recognition of their relationship, though only 14% are completely on board with full legal recognition called marriage.
- 9) **Independents are overwhelmingly supportive of gay rights.** More than a third of Independents (35%) say that gay marriage should be either a very high or somewhat high priority. 80% of Independents agree that "the government should stay out of the private lives of adults, including gays and lesbians." 40% of Independents favor same sex marriage without any conditions or qualifications whatsoever, while only a slim 11% say there should be no legal recognition of a relationship between gay and lesbian couples.
- 10) **Younger voters under 45 are robustly, decisively and aggressively pro gay rights.** 55% of voters under the age of 45 support marriage equality. 60% of voter under 45 voters supported the marriage ballot in Maine, while 58% felt the same in Washington. 66% of Independent voters believe that gay and lesbian couples should have the legal right to marry. In our Republican survey, one third of GOPers under 45 favor granting gay couples full legal rights, while 68% favor giving gay couples at least some legal rights. And these young voters are poised to dominate the electorate - already the millennial generation has surpassed baby boomers in terms of raw size: 95 million people were born between 1982 and 2002, while there are 85 million baby boomers born between 1946 and 1964. As we move into 2016 and 2020, Millennial turnout will dwarf that of the boomers. Given these numbers, it would seem that as the electorate ages, they will become increasingly ready for their elected officials, candidates and party leaders to embrace more gay-friendly attitudes.